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GÉMELLION, ENAMELLED COPPER, FRENCH (LIMOGES)  
LAST HALF OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY A.D.  
*Gift of The Founders Society, 1942*

## **IN MEMORIAM—ALBERT KAHN**

IN THE DEATH of Albert Kahn the Detroit Institute of Arts has suffered a great loss. For more than twenty years his constant interest and constructive advice have helped the development of the museum. His quickness of perception, his practical sense, his understanding of human nature and his forward-driving energy enabled him to solve almost at a glance problems which to others might have seemed insurmountable. No one could resist the directness and sincerity of his approach to life and his vitality was an inspiration to everyone who worked with him.

From the museum point of view he was an ideal Arts Commissioner, as his greatness in his own field gave him also the modesty of the wise who know that even the deepest knowledge has human limitations. The many gifts which he made to the museum were most carefully selected after consultation with the museum staff, for he wished to make his gifts constructive additions to the collection. According to his wide interest in art, he made his gifts in many fields. His love of early sculpture is shown in the impressive head of an apostle of the Spanish Gothic and the fascinating marble Madonna by Christoforo Solari of the Italian Renaissance. His interest in the decorative arts is indicated by his gifts to the print and textile departments and to the collection of furniture and silver. His own field of art is represented by a graceful eighteenth century doorway from Newport, Rhode Island. His pleasure in French Impressionism led him to the donation of drawings of this school and also a beautiful painting by Jongkind. His last visit to the museum was during the Buddhist exhibition which impressed him so much that he made his last donation to the Far Eastern department. He will be remembered by all friends of the museum for these generous gifts, but more so for the everliving spirit of his forceful personality.

W.R.V.

## **A LIMOGES ENAMELLED GEMELLION**

AN ENAMELLED copper basin of the thirteenth century, noteworthy as an example of French Gothic style and medieval enamelling technique, has recently been added to the growing collection of the arts of the Middle Ages in the Detroit Institute of Arts as a gift of the Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society.<sup>1</sup>

The interior of this basin, here illustrated, is decorated in champlevé enamelling with figures and vine motives reserved in the metal against enamelled backgrounds of blue-gray and white, with accents of dark wax-red and turquoise blue. Within the central medallion which is encircled by a thin white line, a falconer, mounted on a prancing steed, carries his bird on his right hand. The background of this figure and the surrounding vine tendrils is blue-gray. The vine in the exergue is on a white ground. The upward curving wall of the basin, which terminates in a flat rim ornamented with a reciprocal saw-tooth pattern of metal and blue enamel, is covered with a series of six interlocking circles of red enamel, cut off by the central medallion so that they form six interlaced lobes within which, against a background of vine motives on blue-gray enamel, are six radiating

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standing figures of women in long robes with their arms held in what appear to be varied dancing poses. The spandrels above the lobes or arches contain symmetrical vine motives against a white ground. On the back of the basin a large rosette is engraved in the metal. The metallic parts were undoubtedly once gilded but time and use have worn away the gilt as well as some of the engraved details on the surfaces of the figures, without, however, destroying the original contrast of metal and enamel or the striking suitability of the pattern to the circular surface of the vessel.

The falconer and dancers depicted on this basin offer glimpses of life in the Gothic period. Falconry and hawking had an important place in the Middle Ages. It is interesting to note that the most celebrated medieval account of the art of falconry, the *de arte venandi cum avibus* was approximately contemporary with the Detroit enamel, having been written about 1244 to 1250 by no less a person than the Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederick II, for his son Manfred. Its comprehensive text is illuminated by numerous representations of falconers on horseback and afoot and of the birds and their prey. In their formal beauty combined with lively realism these manuscript illustrations afford interesting comparisons with the subject matter of the Detroit enamelled basin.<sup>2</sup>

Although not generally countenanced by the Church during the Middle Ages, dancing could not be suppressed and persisted in the folk-dancing of the common people as well as in the dances of court entertainers. Gradually various dances were developed as features of courtly life, and some were even taken over by the Church. On this enamelled basin is perhaps represented one of the most popular of medieval dances, the carole (whence the present-day song or carol of Christmas and other feast days), a sort of processional in which the dancers turned from right to left in marching steps.<sup>3</sup>

Viewed as a whole, the design upon the Detroit basin reveals its Gothic character in the combination of an architectural solidity of underlying geometric pattern, which was the heritage of the Gothic period from the ancient Greek and Roman world through the Romanesque, with a lively variety of poses in the figures, which reveal Gothic line and naturalism, combined with the dynamic irregularity of the spiralling vine derived from the Near East and the barbaric tradition of the North. Within the narrow limits of this enamelled basin is a Gothic synthesis not incomparable with that of the cathedral of the thirteenth century.

Such a basin was called by the French a *gémellion* (from the Latin *gemellus*, meaning twin, paired or double) because it was one of a pair of basins used in washing the hands before or during religious and secular ceremonies. One of the pair was usually equipped with a spout for pouring; the other, as in the present example, was plain and was the recipient vessel. Perfumed rose-water was prepared in the spouted basin and poured over the hands into the other basin held below.

Basins were also used for washing the hands in religious rites as is well attested by the inventories of church properties, such as that of the cathedral of Oviedo, dating from 1385, which includes this entry: "Two small basins of copper, gilded and enamelled, to pour water over the hands of the priest."<sup>4</sup>

During the Middle Ages forks were not in general use and even spoons were rare. Knives, therefore, were the indispensable eating utensils and the fingers were freely used. Since it was customary for several guests at a meal to take food with their hands from a central dish, washing of the hands assumed an important role in table manners. From the twelfth to the fourteenth century this ceremony was accomplished with the aid of two basins, as contemporary records affirm and illuminated

manuscripts illustrate,<sup>5</sup> and it was only in the later Middle Ages that the two basins were superseded by the more convenient ewer or pitcher and basin.

A survey of the existing examples of enamelled gémellions reveals that they were adorned with both religious and secular subject matter, the latter perhaps predominating, as befitting their dual use for liturgical and domestic hand-washing. Among the profane subjects are knights and huntsmen on horseback or afoot, courtiers with their ladies, musicians and dancers, and armorial shields. Yet it is certain that subject matter had little relation to the use of the gémellions—that a prince may as well have washed his hands between the Coronation of the Virgin and St. Michael vanquishing the dragon as a priest have used a pair of basins on which were represented a knight of offering a casket to his lady and an arrangement of the arms of France and Castile. The Detroit gémellion is a characteristic example of a medieval object which may have served both sacred and profane uses. This was not uncommon in an age when religion and daily life were so closely allied.

The problem of localizing and dating European enamels of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the style of this gémellion is fraught with difficulties. Extensive study only makes apparent that the enamels once attributed without question to the French town of Limoges may have been made in a number of other centers inside and outside France. Certain it is that Limoges was well known from the twelfth century on for its metalwork and enamelling. Contemporary documents mention many craftsmen and speak often of metal objects in "Limoges work" (*de opere Lemoviceno, de opere lemovicensi*, or simply *de Limoges*), clearly indicating that some special technique was intended and generally understood to mean champlevé enamelling.<sup>6</sup> By comparison with other gémellions and related monuments, the Detroit enamelled basin can be tentatively called Limoges work of the second half of the thirteenth century.

This gémellion enters the collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts as a significant document of medieval craftsmanship as well as a reminder of the social and religious practices of the Middle Ages. The six hundred and fifty years or so since it was made have rubbed away the gilding and crackled the enamel, but this simple metal basin with its close-fitting enamelled decoration, well designed for the circular form on which it is placed, has an appeal to the eye and to the hand which will not diminish with time.

FRANCIS WARING ROBINSON

<sup>1</sup>Accession Number: 42.102. Diameter: 8 $\frac{1}{8}$  (22.5 cm.). Gift of the Founders Society, General Membership and Donations Fund, 1942.

<sup>2</sup>C. H. Haskins, "The 'De arte venandi cum avibus' of the Emperor Frederick II," *English Historical Review*, No. CXIII (July, 1921), pp. 334-355; W. F. Volbach, *Pontificia Accademia di Archeologia, Rendiconti*, Vol. XV (1939), pp. 1-31; G. H. Edgell, *History of Sienese Painting*, New York, 1932, pp. 20-23.

<sup>3</sup>L. Kirstein, *Dance*, New York, 1935, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup>M. C. Ross, "An Enamelled Gémellion of Limoges," *Bulletin of the Fogg Art Museum*,

<sup>5</sup>E. Rupin, *L'Oeuvre de Limoges*, Paris, 1890, pp. 543-550.  
Vol. II, No. 1 (Nov. 1932), pp. 9-13, especially p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>M. C. Ross, "De Opere Lemoviceno," *Speculum*, Vol XVI (1941), pp. 453-458.

## A MING SCROLL

THE RELATIONSHIP of man to nature is one of the fundamental questions with which man has struggled since "the dawn of conscience." The answers to this

question color his every action and determine his folklore or culture. We can readily grasp the values of a civilization from the artifacts produced under the sway of the prevailing view of nature. From the earliest times nature was a fundamental element in Chinese life. Terrible or benevolent, nature was thought of as a power different from and superior to man and controlling his destinies. At first, nature was thought of as demoniacal, then in a highly abstract ritualized manner. Then shortly before the time of Christ the Taoist school of philosophy developed a view of nature that laid the foundations of thought and attitude for the great school of landscape painting. Taoism held to an intuitive awareness of nature as an ineffable and all pervading force. This Way (Tao) was the standard to which life must be harmoniously adjusted by the individual. Thus man conformed to nature and the pattern of Chinese landscape was set; not a park-like controlled landscape but a vision of vast mountains and rivers, the broad features of a controlling and omnipotent nature, synthesized or particularized.

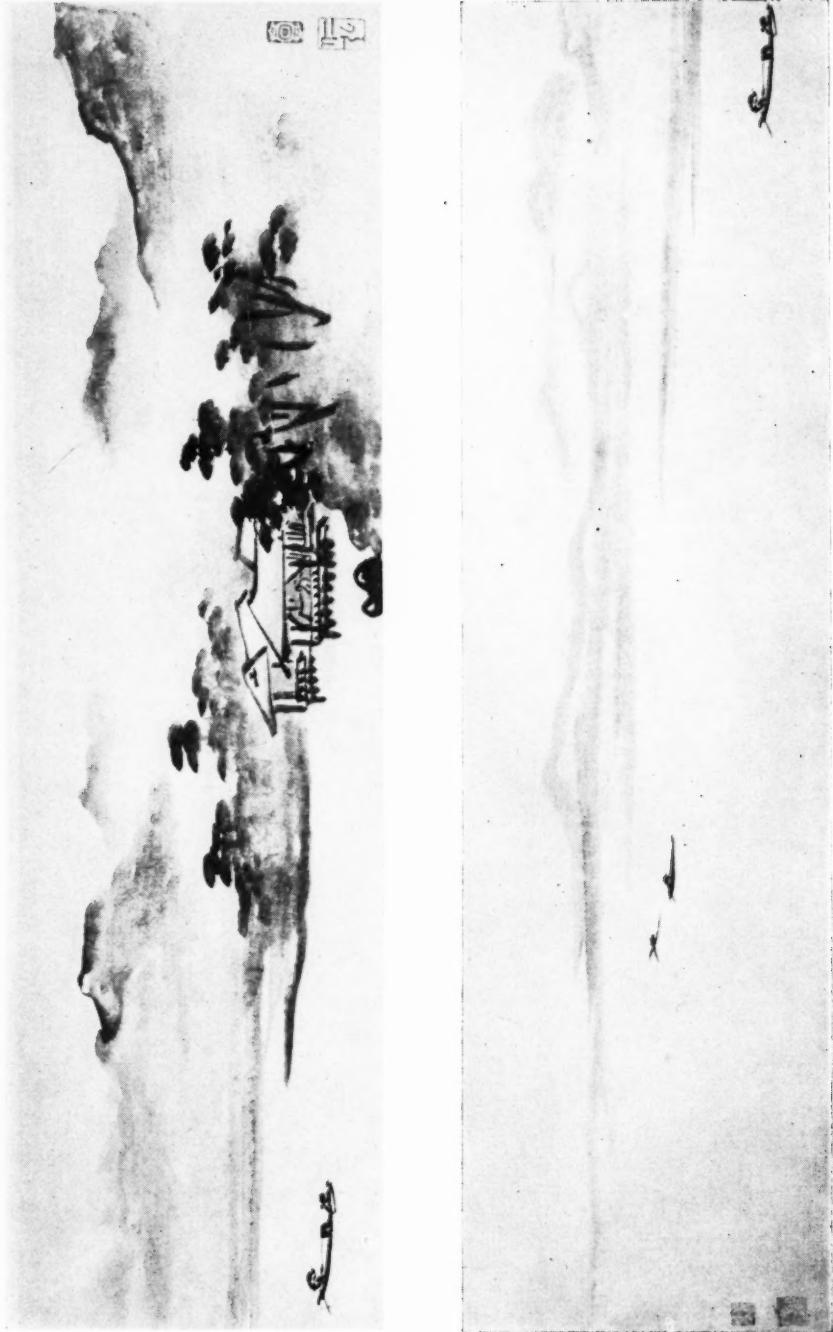
The museum has recently acquired a scroll<sup>1</sup> by Kuo Hsü, of the Ming dynasty, a landscape in the great tradition. There are two paintings mounted on the scroll, one a landscape and the second a drawing of a fisherman illustrating a poem by the artist. The paintings are in the simple and free running Southern style associated with the Chê school of "scholarly" painting. Much of the scholarly work is dull and mechanical, being painted from formulae by amateur gentlemen, but occasionally among these there is an artist who succeeds in placing more than exercises on his paper and who creates an art of a different and more elegant flavor than the products of T'ang or Sung, but with the common denominator of an intuitive understanding of Tao. That it happens at all can be attributed to a revived Taoism and Ch'an Buddhism, mutually influenced, and each stressing universal nature and individual contemplation. The quality of this later painting depends upon a personal attitude rather than upon tradition and group achievement as in earlier periods.

The landscape by Kuo Hsü begins roughly with a distant ridge and then moves to a grove of trees with three fishing huts at the water's edge. From here the elements of the picture become more simple, distant mountains in the background and the vast expanse of river or lake in the foreground. The great empty space and the suggested stillness is emphasized by the three small homecoming boats. The serene grandeur of nature, as well as the sense of infinite space, is conveyed by the cool and impersonal monochrome of ink, varied in depth and smoothness of wash by the most subtle and developed of traditional techniques. Color is a suggested and subordinate element; the form and movement of sovereign nature is the theme.

The second picture is of a more literary nature, in the romantic vein of the scholar's style. The fisherman drawing in his net is a rapid illustration and characterization of the poem written in a free running variant of "grass" calligraphy.

A strong wind bends down the iron branches;  
Though one should travel through a thousand  
mountains, he would not meet a single bird.  
Rich people sit at banquets and taste good fish,  
Merry with wine, which of them has a thought for the fisherman?

(Signed) Ch'ing-Kuang (pen name of Kuo Hsü) wrote the poem and painted the picture. (Translation by Dr. Arthur W. Hummel of the Library of Congress.)



LANDSCAPE BY KUO HSU, CHINESE, 1456—after 1526 A. D. Gift of The Sarah Bacon Hill Memorial Fund, 1942



1526 A.D.  
KUO HSÜ  
CHINESE  
FISHERMAN

1526 A.D.

FISHERMAN BY KUO HSÜ, CHINESE, 1456—after 1526 A. D. Gift of The Sarah Bacon Hill Memorial Fund, 1942

The poem states the opposition of life with nature to the rich existence of the cities. The picture visualizes the choice of the artist, solitary and austere, subjected to the elements, wind, water and land. The sincerity of both picture and poem is felt more surely when we look again at the landscape and see that Kuo was deeply aware of the meaning of his choice. The scholarly painters were too often romantic aesthetes who, "like Wordsworth were fond of nature" (William Blake).

Kuo Hsü was born in 1456 and must have died after 1526 for there is a painting of that date in the former Chinese Imperial collection.<sup>2</sup> He was evidently a famous painter of the age for Giles points out that his works brought high prices, while his refusal to follow a rebellious prince brought him much praise. Although Kuo Hsü is usually assigned a place in the Chê school his work has nothing in common with such artists as Chou Wên-ching whose monotonous recapitulations of such Sung designs as those of Ma Yuan are only too numerous. Kuo belongs with the great men of the Chê school, T'ai Chin and Wu Wei, with those who were a willing part of tradition but who recognized the necessity of adherence to the old attitudes and concepts rather than to subsidiary technical means. Paintings by these men can never be called "after an earlier design." Their paintings are in the traditional spirit of landscape: cryptic and intuitive.

As far as we know only four of Kuo's works are known, this scroll and three figure scrolls in Chinese collections.<sup>3</sup> It is probable that our pictures date from about 1500.

SHERMAN E. LEE

<sup>1</sup>Accession Number 42.51. Makemono. Ink on paper. Landscape section, Length: 62 inches; Width: 8½ inches. Fisherman section, Length: 59½ inches; Width: 8½ inches. Gift of the Sarah Bacon Hill Memorial Fund, 1942.

The following seals appear on the scroll (from right to left): Kuo; Jén-hung (personal name of Kuo). Mēng Hsü Ting (Studio of P'ang Yüan-chi, a modern Shanghai collector); Hsü Ting possession; Kuo; Ch'ing-K'uang (pen name of Kuo); Jén-hung (Kuo); Mēng-Hsü Lai-chen (P'ang Yüan-chi); Appreciation and admiration of P'ang Yüan-chi; Mēng Ting; Hsü-chai has examined and approved (P'ang Yüan-chi).

Published: *Buddhist Art*, The Detroit Institute of Arts, October, 1942. Cat. No. 79.

<sup>2</sup>*Ku Kung Shu Hua Chib* Vol. XV. Hsieh An with his Concubines.

<sup>3</sup>Contag and Wang, *Maler und Sammler Stempel aus der Ming und Ch'ing Zeit*, Shanghai, 1940, p. 318 lists a scroll in the collection of Fêng Ch'ao-jan. *Koban Shu Shina Meya Sen Shu*, Kyoto, Vol. 3, Plate 13 shows a figure of Hsieh An, of great strength when compared with the more ordinary scroll in the former Imperial Collection.

## HOURS OF ADMISSION

The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue, is open free daily except Mondays and Christmas Day. Visiting hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday afternoon, 1 to 6; Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday evenings, 7 to 10; Saturday, 9 to 5; Sunday, 2 to 6. The grounds of the Russell A. Alger Branch Museum for Italian Renaissance Art are open daily. The Museum is open Saturday, 10 to 6; Sundays, 2 to 6.